



**Testimony
Betsy Gara
Executive Director
Connecticut Council of Small Towns
Before the Transportation Committee
March 8, 2013**

**RE: SB-849 - AN ACT CONCERNING LOCAL BRIDGE PROGRAM REFORM AND
ESTABLISHING A LOCAL TRANSPORTATION CAPITAL PROGRAM.**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) **strongly supports SB-849**, which will streamline the design and construction of municipal road and bridge projects. Supporting investment in local infrastructure is vital to Connecticut's small towns. Well-maintained roads and bridges provide small towns with a strong foundation for supporting economic development and protecting public safety. COST has identified this bill as a top priority for our member towns.

Local Transportation Capital Program - SB-849 creates the Local Transportation Capital Program and promises to provide funding to towns for road projects more quickly by providing funding directly to towns and then seeking reimbursement from the federal Department of Transportation (DOT). Under the current process, funding from the federal DOT is provided to the state DOT and then to municipalities, creating delays in funding much-needed road projects. In addition, the proposal will make it easier for municipalities to utilize federal funding, allowing them to target more resources to capital improvements rather than administrative costs.

Local Bridge Program - SB-849, in conjunction with SB-842 before the Finance Committee, restores funding to the Local Bridge program and increases the percentage of costs that towns may be eligible to receive under the program to address concerns regarding deficient bridges and culverts.

Towns and cities in Connecticut are responsible for maintaining more than 3,400 bridges and culverts. Recognizing the huge costs associated with constructing and maintaining bridges, the legislature created the Local Bridge program in 1984. However, funding for the program was eliminated in 2009 to help address the state's budget deficit. Although federal funding and other state funds are available for a limited number of projects, towns are struggling to find ways to maintain bridges.

According to an analysis prepared by the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), over a third of Connecticut municipal bridges are considered either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. **COST urges your support for SB-849**, which reactivates and modernizes the Local Bridge Program. We also ask lawmakers to explore opportunities to streamline the various state agency permitting processes to address concerns that it can take several years to gain approvals.

COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns.

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